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ABSTRACT

Research on family interaction has characterized family style on centripetal and centrifugal dimensions, representing opposing natures with their own continua. Centripetal forces produce binding, or a prolonged process of separation of parent and child; centrifugal forces preciptate expelling, or hastened separation and premature autonomy. To examine how families with aggressive (N=14) or nonaggressive (N=13) boys differ on the Scales for Centripetal/Centrifugal Family Style (SCCFS; Kelsey-Smith and Beavers, 1981) 27 families were studied. Each family was videotaped during problem solving interactions. The videotapes were rated on seven of the eight subscales of the SCCFS. An analysis of the results showed significant centripetal/centrifugal differences in four of the seven subscales tested. Specifically, families with nonaggressive boys compared to families with aggressive boys, scored significantly lower on Positive Feelings, Parental Conflict, and Parental Control--Aggressive Behavior, and significantly higher on Internal Scapegoating and Parental Control--Clinging Behavior. These findings suggest that centrifugally-oriented families may be less forthcoming with positive feelings than those on the other end of the continuum. (BL)

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Centripetal/Centrifugal Family Style of Families with Aggressive and Non-Aggressive Boys

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Abstract

Kelsey-Smith and Beavers developed the Scales for Centripetal/Centrifugal Family Style with which to evaluate family interactions, hypothesizing that dysfunctional CP families often produce neurotic offspring. Conversely, dysfunctional CF families are thought to produce a disproportionate share of antisocially behaving offspring. The present study contrasted fourteen families with an aggressive boy and thirteen families with a non-aggressive boy on seven of the eight scales developed by Kelsey-Smith and Beavers. Families with non-aggressive boys scored significantly lower on Positive Feelings, Parental Conflict, and Parental Control--Aggressive and significantly higher on Internal Scapegoating and Parental Control--Clinging Behavior.

Despite the various schools of thought currently enjoying support within the specialty of family therapy, there exist numerous similarities across models (Olson, Russell, and Sprenkle, 1983; Kniskern and Gurman, 1983; Beavers and Voeller, 1983). Analogous, if not parallel, constructs may be found with regard to etiology, symptomatology, and intervention strategies when one makes a comparative analysis of the literature.

Of some salience among these similarities are the constructs of enmeshment-disengagement (Minuchin, Montalvo, Guerney, Rosman, and Schumer, 1967; Minuchin, 1974), cohesion (Olson et al., 1983), and the centripetal-centrifugal dimensions of Stierlin (1973) and Beavers (1977). While these conceptual schemes differ in many respects, they also contain striking similarities. A brief overview follows.

Minuchin, et al (1967), while viewing the enmeshment-disengagement poles as being clinically related, suggest that these labels describe characteristic ways of establishing contact among family members, not merely modes of behavior of the individual members. As a result of examining a group of families primarily consisting of single-parent-as-head-of-household, these investigators observed contrasts. Enmeshed families were often orchestrated by a parent who is dependent, has poor self-esteem, finds parenthood as a primary source of validation, frequently displays somatization responses to stress, and perceives self as absolutely responsible for the children's actions. Additionally, signs of loss of control over the children result in anxious feelings.

On the other hand, disengagement, the relinquishment of the executive functions within the family, was characterized by: a lack of interpersonal contact, parental apathy, little inter-member attentiveness, and a marked inability of the parents to establish control over the children. Further, disengaged parents displayed anxious feelings upon gaining control over the children. Also noteworthy in this sample of disengaged mothers was their isolation and attendant inability to make contact

with the external world (such as drawing upon extrafamilial sources for support). Given this depiction of such a family, it seems probable that one would observe in the disengaged family a paucity of expression of caring among family members.

Olson, et al (1983) offers a revised cohesion construct, one consisting of the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another. In their model cohesion is seen as a curvilinear dimension where the central regions represent optimal functioning and dysfunctional systems may be found at either extreme. One end of the continuum, enmeshment, is seen as a condition that prevents the individuation of family members through over-identification and extreme loyalty. The opposite end, disengagement, is believed to be manifested through high levels of autonomy and limited attachment and/or commitment to the family group. Among other things, this model may lead one to infer that families found at this extreme would encourage dependent behavior in their offspring. The opposite end of the continuum, disengagement, is believed to be manifested through high levels of autonomy and limited attachment and/or commitment to the family group.

Individuation is a key result of family patterns of interaction according to Stierlin, Rucker-Embden, Wetzel, and Wirsching (1980). It is largely dependent, they argue, on the transactional mode of the family constellation. These transactional modes are thought of as relational structures that act over long periods of time wherein the separation of parents and offspring succeeds or fails. Two transactional modes identified are: 1) binding, and 2) expelling.

Centripetal forces are said to be operating when binding occurs, a process that results in a protracted, and often unsuccessful, separation of parent and child. On the other hand, centrifugal forces precipitate expelling, a process in which the child's separation is hastened and premature autonomy develops. In such cases the child is often rejected and neglected.

Beavers, et al (1977, 1981, 1983) credits Stierlin (1972, 1973) and Erikson (1963) as founders and developers of the notion of the centripetal-centrifugal continuum. Beavers' group reports close approximation of this dimension to that of Olson's (1983) cohesion. Operationally, centripetal families are those seen as deriving most relationship satisfactions from within the family. Conversely, centrifugal families see the outside world as holding the greatest potential for satisfaction.

Reminiscent of Olson's (1983) position toward balanced families, flexibility is built into this model as the authors contend that all families exhibit these styles to varying degrees. It is also presumed that stylistic choice is not static; that a family can variously display both tendencies. However, the assumption is that the more extreme a family is in this choice, the greater its level of dysfunction. Noteworthy, too, is that the Beavers group views appropriate placement on the centripetal-centrifugal continuum as largely dependent on the family's life stage. In other words, a young family with dependent toddlers is healthily more centripetal in its functioning while an older family with teen-aged children is expected to be more centrifugal in style.

In order to clearly consider these two conceptual schemes, it will be helpful for the reader to recall that Olson's model consists of two extremes, Enmeshment and Disengagement, where pathology is most found. Between these extremes are found two regions, Connected and Separated, where more optimal family functioning occurs. Beavers' continuum, on the other hand, presents the centripetal-centrifugal styles as curvilinear in nature. This model places several disturbed families at one extreme and optimal systems at the other. Between these ends are the groupings of: Borderline, Mid-range, and Adequate families; styles which move progressively from the more dysfunctional to the more adaptive. This approach varies interestingly in that with either the centripetal or centrifugal style, a family may fall at any of

the above-noted points on the continuum. In other words, centripetal and centrifugal dimensions represent stylistic differences of opposing natures that have their own continua.

As will be seen, the sample used for the current research is thought to fall near Beavers' mid-point; probably representing Optimal-to-Adequate centripetal systems on one end and Adequate-to-Midrange centrifugal families on the other. When considering such a sample from Olson's perspective, these families would likely be placed near the Connected region on the one hand and around the Separated area on the other.

While pointing out their similarities and discussing their differences, Beavers and Olson have been both critical and complimentary of one another. Their dialogue in the literature has been portrayed as an effort to stimulate needed research in family functioning. Likewise, Kniskern and Gurman (1983) call for a cessation of destructive jealousy and provincialism within this area while concomitantly challenging others to enter the dialogue. Thus, there appears to be some consensus for more integrative work in the area of family study. The research herein described is submitted as one effort to participate in this dialogue as it examines Beavers' concepts specifically, while encouraging consideration of the others previously mentioned, generally. Spefically, this study examines how families of aggressive male children differ from families of non-aggressive male children on the Kelsey-Smith and Beavers (1981) "Scale for Centripetal/Centrifugal Family Style".

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

In conjunction with a two year long descriptive and therapy outcome study of family functioning conducted at Indiana State University, twenty-seven family triads with boys ranging in age from six to eleven years were studied. Fourteen

of the families had a boy identified as Aggressive, hereafter referred to as FA's. Thirteen of the families had a boy identified as Non-Aggressive, hereafter referred to as FNA's. FA's were assumed to approximate centrifugal families. FNA's were assumed to approximate mid-point centripetal-centrifugal families.

Subjects were selected from grades two through six in cooperation with teachers in a local school corporation. Teachers were asked to identify the two most aggressive and the two least aggressive children in their respective classrooms using behavioral descriptors on the Child Behavior Checklist (see Printz, Conner, and Wilson, 1981). Additionally, parental reports from the Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach, 1966) were used to insure that the child was observed by the parents as being either aggressive or non-aggressive at home. Thus, each child was determined to be either aggressive or non-aggressive in two settings, school and home. Children identified as either aggressive or non-aggressive in only one setting were eliminated from the sample. Girls were eliminated from the sample because they were highly under-represented in the aggressive category. This sampling procedure yielded fourteen families with an aggressive boy (FA's) and thirteen families with a non-aggressive boy (FNA's).

Procedure

The families were videotaped while engaged in Blechman-style (1976) problem-solving interactions of: 1) planning a meal, and 2) discussing a concern chosen by the mother regarding the child's behavior. Each interactional sequence was of 5 minutes duration, for a total of 10 minutes. The tapes were then rated by one of two teams of judges. These teams consisted of two students each, three of which were doctoral students in Counseling Psychology. The fourth was a Master's-level student in a Marriage and Family Therapy program. All raters had theoretical training in family therapy and had practical experience in the area. Ratings were done using

the Kelsey-Smith and Beavers (1981) "Scales for Centripetal/Centrifugal Family Style" and were completed at the conclusion of viewing both of the 5-minute segments. Seven items of the scale's total of eight were used. The item regarding a discussion of the parents about their marriage was omitted as it was incompatible with the design of the overall research project. Inter-rater reliability figures for this study were: Team 1=.60, Team 2=.73, and Total=.68. The reliability coefficients were computed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation. Individual interrater reliability scores for the scales are presented in Appendix A.

RESULTS

Because this study attempted to replicate some of Kelsey-Smith and Beavers' earlier findings with a sample of a different nature, their hypotheses were slightly modified to better fit this sample's characteristics. Following each hypothesis is an indication, in parenthesis, of whether this investigation supported the findings of Kelsey-Smith and Beaver (1981).

Hypothesis 1: FNA's will tend to exhibit greater concern with social correctness than FA's. (Suggested support for the inverse)

Hypothesis 2: FA's will tend to spread blame among family members, whereas FNA's will characteristically not exhibit blaming. (Inverse supported)

Hypothesis 3: Regardless of the apparent degree of closeness present, FNA's will verbally emphasize family closeness to a greater degree than will FA's. (Suggested support)

Hypothesis 4: FNA's will tend to exhibit genuine expressions of warmth and caring, while FA's will be more likely to deny positive feelings or to exhibit fraudulence when positive feelings are expressed. (Supported)

Hypothesis 5: Inter-parental conflict in FA's will tend to be overt, while in FNA's there will be little overt conflict between parents. (Supported)

Hypothesis 6: FA's will display parental discouragement of clinging, dependent behavior by their children more than will FNA's. (Supported)

Hypothesis 7: FA's will encourage aggressive, disruptive behavior by their children more than will FNA's. (Supported)

Findings. Table 1 indicates significant centripetal/centrifugal differences in four of the seven subscales tested. Inverse significance was found for one scale and suggested inverse support was also found for one scale. The remaining scale suggested support in the predicted direction.

FA's differ most sharply from FNA's in being less open in the expression of positive feelings (Scale 4: Positive Feelings) in addition to behaving more discouragingly toward clinging, dependent behavior (Scale 6: Parental Control--Clinging Behavior). Scapegoating style (Scale 2: Internal Scapegoating) also reveals dramatic differences, although not in the predicted direction, as FNA's more frequently spread blame for problems among all the family members and FA's tended to either blame difficulties on one family member or on external sources.

While less significant statistically, differences were also found with respect to displays of parental conflict (Scale 5: Parental Conflict) and the encouragement of aggressive behavior (Scale 7: Parental Control--Aggressive Behavior). FA's displayed inter-parental conflict more overtly than did their counterparts, while FNA's more consistently discouraged aggressive, disruptive behavior than did FA's.

Although statistically insignificant in this study, a suggested difference was seen in the groups' expressions of closeness (Scale 3: Closeness) as the FNA's displayed an apparent trend toward more open expressions. Interestingly, another suggested difference was seen on the subscale concerning social presentation (Scale 1: Social Presentation). Contrary to the predicted difference, FNA's appeared to be less concerned with social correctness than did FA's. The investigators for

this study suggest that since the critical values for subscales #1 and #3 so closely approached significance (.07), even a slightly larger sample may have resulted in statistical significance for these items.

DISCUSSION

The original work that employed this rating instrument utilized a sample that the authors characterized as falling within the mid-range on the centripetal-centrifugal continuum. When one considers the diversity represented between the extremes of the total range, it becomes apparent that the original study dealt with a relatively constricted grouping. The present investigation examined stylistic differences of families of an even more homogenous nature as it viewed families that are less dysfunctional (less centrifugal) than did the Kelsey-Smith research. The same may be said for the other (centripetal) end of the range, as the present study looked at presumably healthy families (non-centripetal) while the first investigation used a more centripetally-oriented group. The authors' assertion that this study used a considerable narrower range of families tends to accentuate its findings.

For example, strong support was found in the present work for hypotheses concerning the expression of positive feelings, overt parental conflict, and parental control over the child's behavior. One could logically argue that finding such support with sharply contrasting samples is relatively easy and, therefore, less meaningful. However, the opposite argument can be made when the divergence is reduced: that Kelsey-Smith and Beavers' constructs are even more meaningful in light of the homogeneity of the groups under study.

On the other hand, the results of this study that profoundly oppose the original findings are very thought-provoking. Worthy of attention are those hypotheses relevant to family blame-assignment and social correctness. In the original work centripetal families were found more likely to try to appear socially appropriate and centrifugal families the obverse. The present investigation found the opposite

to be true when comparing mid-point families with moderately centrifugal systems; perhaps suggestive of the healthy families' self-assurance and social aplomb, factors that may lead them to be less preoccupied with social concerns. Furthermore, the argument could be extended to assert that more centrifugally-inclined families are less interested in looking good while their more healthy and less-centrifugal counterparts desire to make good impressions. In other words, if this dimension is curvilinear, disinterest could be found at both ends of the scale, albeit for vastly different reasons.

It may be for similar reasons that seemingly unexpected results were found in this study concerning verbal expressions of closeness. Is it reasonable to suppose that a dysfunctionally centripetal family may more stongly need to express its closeness while its more-healthy-but-still-centripetally-oriented counterpart is so secure that such expressions are less important? At the other end of the continuum, this sample's centrifugal representatives may be less inclined to actively deny closeness than were Kelsey-Smith and Beavers'.

Olson, et al (1983) quite justifiably question the interrater reliabilities of the original investigation. While the present research obtained better interrater reliability figures, .52 versus .68, this still must be considered a weakness as the latter coefficient still allows only 46 per cent of the true variance to be accounted for; leaving 54 percent as error variance. The present investigators believe that this suggests Beavers' constructs to be quite useful, but that the assessment device with which they are measured is less precise than that which is desirable for both research and, especially, clinical purposes.

Regardless of the rationales that may serve to support varied conjectures for the findings developed in both the original study as well as in this quasi-replication, some commonalities persist when one examines these stylistic poles. Centrifugally-oriented families appear to be less forthcoming with positive feelings than do

those toward the other end. Also, responses of the two groups to clinging, dependent behaviors are quite distinct as are their reactions to the aggressive, disruptive displays of their children. In large measure, the present investigators regard their findings as supportive of Beavers' constructs. They also may be seen as implying support for other theorists' similar concepts. Further research is called for, however, as populations of various compositions require study in order to more adequately test these constructs as well as the devices used to assess them. Further refinement in this area may lead to a most useful implement for clinical work with families--one that possesses realistic and meaningful predictive validity.

Footnotes

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APPENDIX A

Subscale Item Reliability

	r	p
Social Presentation	.4910	.001
Internal Scapegoating	.5797	.001
Expression of Closeness	.5270	.001
Positive Feelings	.6492	.001
Parental Conflict	.7023	.001
Parental Control--Clinging, Dependent	.4648	.001
Parental Control--Aggressive, Disruptive	.7263	.001

Mean Values of Family Style Scales in Families of Model and Aggressive Boys

	Scale	FNA $\bar{X}$	FA $\bar{X}$	t*	Significance Level
1.	Social Presentation	3.29	2.92	1.51	.07
2.	Internal Scapegoating	3.52	2.75	3.15	.002**
3.	Closeness++	2.89	3.09	-1.53	.07
4.	Positive Feelings	2.40	3.16	-3.01	.003**
5.	Parental Conflict++	2.13	2.55	-1.87	.037**
6.	Parental Control--Clinging Behavior	3.87	3.30	2.31	.015**
7.	Parental Control--Aggressive Behavior++	1.92	2.36	-1.98	.03**

*Student's t: One-tailed

**Significant

++Set up in the inverse direction of the other scales: lower scales indicate centripetal qualities, higher scores indicate centrifugal qualities